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SUBJECT: MBEKI SAYS HE WILL NOT SEEK THIRD TERM

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¶1. (U) President Mbeki said in a press interview February 5 that he will not seek a third term as South African President. Mbeki was last elected in 2004 for a second five-year term. Section 88 of the South African Constitution limits presidents to two terms of office, and a third term for Mbeki would have required a constitutional amendment. Mbeki said the ANC has "taken a stand not to alter the constitution even with two-thirds majority support in government."

¶2. (U) Mbeki's comments put to rest recent speculation about a third term caused by an initiative of governing alliance junior partner, the South African National Civic Organization (SANCO). SANCO head Mlungisi Hlongwane said on January 28 that he would table a motion in the governing alliance to change the Constitution to remove presidential term limits. Hlongwane argued that term limits are a European concept and deny South Africa "the opportunity to sustain development programmes that had been started." The ANC's other alliance partners, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and South African Communist Party (SACP), firmly rejected Hlongwane's suggestion to amend the constitution, as have most media commentators.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: While Mbeki rejected the possibility of running for another term as South African President in 2009, we note that he did not close the door on pursuing a third term as ANC President in 2007.
TEITELBAUM